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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EPET](#) [IT](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: ITALIAN AMBASSADOR ON MADURO, CHAVEZ MEETINGS WITH
ITALIAN FM

REF: A. 06 CARACAS 00910

[1](#)B. ROME 00239

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Daniel Lawton
for Reason 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The Italian Ambassador to Venezuela Luigi Maccotta briefed the Ambassador March 6 on the Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema's February 29 visit to Venezuela. The visit comes shortly after a settlement agreement was reached between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) and the Italian oil company ENI. During his low-profile visit, D'Alema met separately with Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro and President Chavez to discuss increased criminal incidents targeting Italian citizens and democracy in Latin America. Maduro said the BRV plans to press for the creation of Unasur, an alternative regional organization that excludes USG participation. Separately, Maccotta believes Chavez no longer commands a majority of the popular support and is likely to radicalize his agenda in an attempt to address his administration's shortcomings. End Summary.

One-Day, Low-Profile Visit

[1](#)2. (C) D'Alema's one-day visit to Venezuela received positive but low-key media coverage. It was mostly billed by the Government of Italy (GOI) and its mission in Caracas as an effort to "reactivate" political and economic relations. D'Alema's visit comes shortly after the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) and the Italian oil company ENI reached an agreement over compensation for the expropriation of the Dacion oil field (reftel). (Note: ENI received compensation after the field was taken over by the BRV as part of its 2006 nationalization of operating service agreement fields. End Note.) Following the settlement, ENI was awarded Bloc 5 to certify reserves in the Faja. Maccotta told the Ambassador the compensation package was satisfactory to them.

High Level Meetings

[1](#)3. (C) D'Alema met separately February 29 with Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro and President Chavez. D'Alema stressed that the construction of a democratic system in Venezuela must be based on pluralism. He also noted that Venezuela was in a position to influence the Cuban transition process. He suggested to Maduro the BRV should urge the new Cuban president to release all political prisoners as a indication he is serious about implementing democratic

changes on the island. If that were to happen, Italy would be willing to speak to the USG about lifting the embargo on Cuba, D'Alema said. Maduro failed to address the proposal directly, and instead commented that regional partners, such as Brazil and Argentina, might be better suited to engage in their discussion on the transition process.

¶4. (C) Maduro expressed interest in re-visiting the idea of implementing Unasur, an inter-American organization that would exclude the United States, as an alternative to the OAS. Maduro said the BRV was thinking of proposing the project during the Rio Group meeting in the Dominican Republic. In response, D'Alema opined that any proposed regional organization should be capable of sustaining vital and constructive relations with the rest of the world.

¶5. (C) Additionally, D'Alema discussed the surge in kidnappings and violent criminal acts directed against Italians in Venezuela. (Note: The Italian mission estimates there might be as many as one million Italian nationals, dual citizens, and/or persons entitled to Italian nationality living in Venezuela. End Note). D'Alema expressed concern to Maduro about the more than 40 Italians who were kidnapped in Venezuela in 2007. He suggested greater cooperation efforts were needed to decrease these incidents.

¶6. (C) During D'Alema's meeting with Chavez, the Venezuelan president emphasized the need to work with "friendly" countries like the GOI and with oil companies, like ENI, because they are not multinationals. The Italian Foreign Minister said Chavez commented surprisingly on Peru, which he said was "in the hands of oligarchs." Maccotta, who also attended the meetings, said that Maduro seemed much less ideological and polemical than Chavez, a point he stressed several times.

Maccotta: Looking Forward

¶7. (C) Maccotta told the Ambassador he believes Chavez has lost a significant amount of popular support since 2007, despite increased government revenue from high oil prices and his complete control of government institutions. In his opinion, the Venezuelan president does not know how to respond to the current political scenario. He predicts Chavez may embrace more radical policies in an attempt to find solutions to long-standing problems. Maccotta said he would not be surprised if Chavez conjured up an excuse to postpone the November mayoral and gubernatorial elections.

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